

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

ON LAND

ADJACENT TO ST DENYS CHURCH

STANFORD DINGLEY

WEST BERKSHIRE

NGR SU 5751 7174

On behalf of

Stanford Dingley Parochial Church Council

MAY 2012

REPORT FOR	Stanford Dingley Parochial Church Council Colin Sheppard Architects Paddock View Main Street West Ilsley Newbury RG20 7AA
PREPARED BY	Gwilym Williams
ILLUSTRATION BY	Andrej Čelovský & Gwilym Williams
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ENQUIRES TO	John Moore Heritage Services Hill View Woodperry Road Beckley Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ Tel/Fax 01865 358300 Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out a two-trench evaluation on land to the north of the Church of St Denys, Stanford Dingley. A ditch, dating from after the Roman period, and either quarry pits or made ground dating from the early 19th century onwards were present. The made ground may well be related to a possible earlier medieval berm on the north side of the manorial moated enclosure.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is located on a parcel of land to the north of St Denys Church, Stanford Dingley (SU 5751 7174). The underlying geology is Upper Chalk, although Second Terrace Gravel deposits extending from the south were present within the proposal area (BGS 268).

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission is sought for change of use of parish land to cemetery, for an extension to St Denys Church cemetery – Land Adjacent To St Denys Church, Stanford Dingley (12/00759/FUL). A consideration is also sought to build a village hall on part of this land to the north of the cemetery extension. Due to the potential for archaeological remains a predetermination field evaluation was recommended by West Berkshire Council Archaeological Service (WBCAS). This was in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). WBCAS has not prepared a Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation, but has been consulted. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* proposing a methodology to satisfy the requirements was prepared by JMHS and agreed with the client and WBCAS.

1.3 Archaeological Background

St Denys church, named after the patron saint of France, contains some of the earliest surviving historic fabric for any building in West Berkshire, with a strong indication that a church has stood on this site for over 1000 years. Immediately to the south east of the church lie the remains of a major medieval manorial complex, which stood within its own moated enclosure. This survives as Manor Farm, of interest in its own right due to the surviving post-medieval barns on the site.

The present church appears to be an enlargement of a small pre-Conquest church without aisles or structural chancel, the north and south walls of which may still exist in the narrower eastern portion of the nave, though pierced by later arches. In the first half of the 12th century the nave was extended westward on wider lines, the original building being probably reserved solely as a chancel (VCH 1924). There are 13th-century ceramic quoins at the junction of the nave and chancel.

In the time of King Edward the Confessor the manor was held freehold of the king by Edric, but at Domesday in 1086 it was held by William fitzAnsculf, and tenanted by Gilbert (Williams & Martin 1992). A mill is also mentioned, but is not referred to

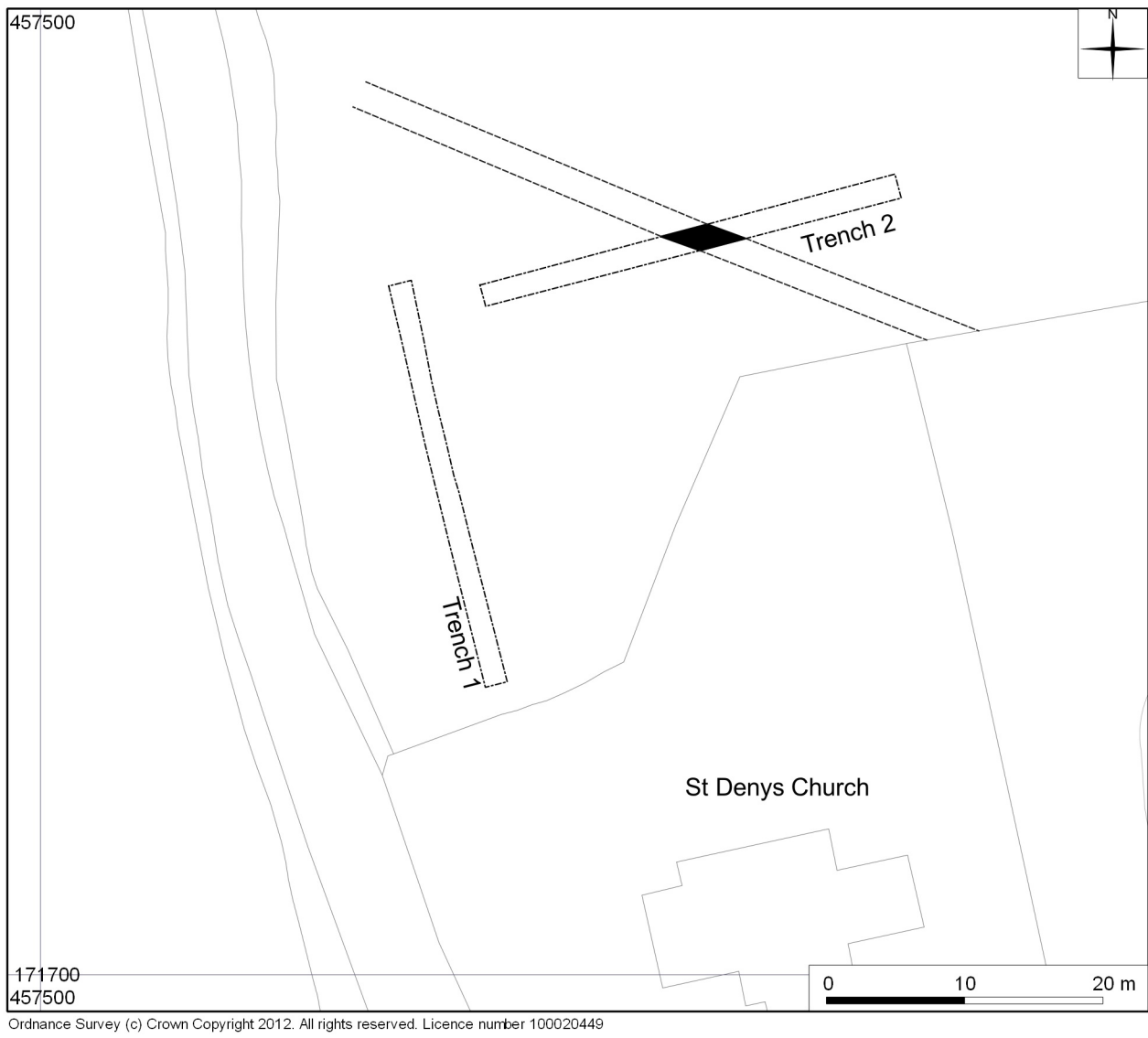
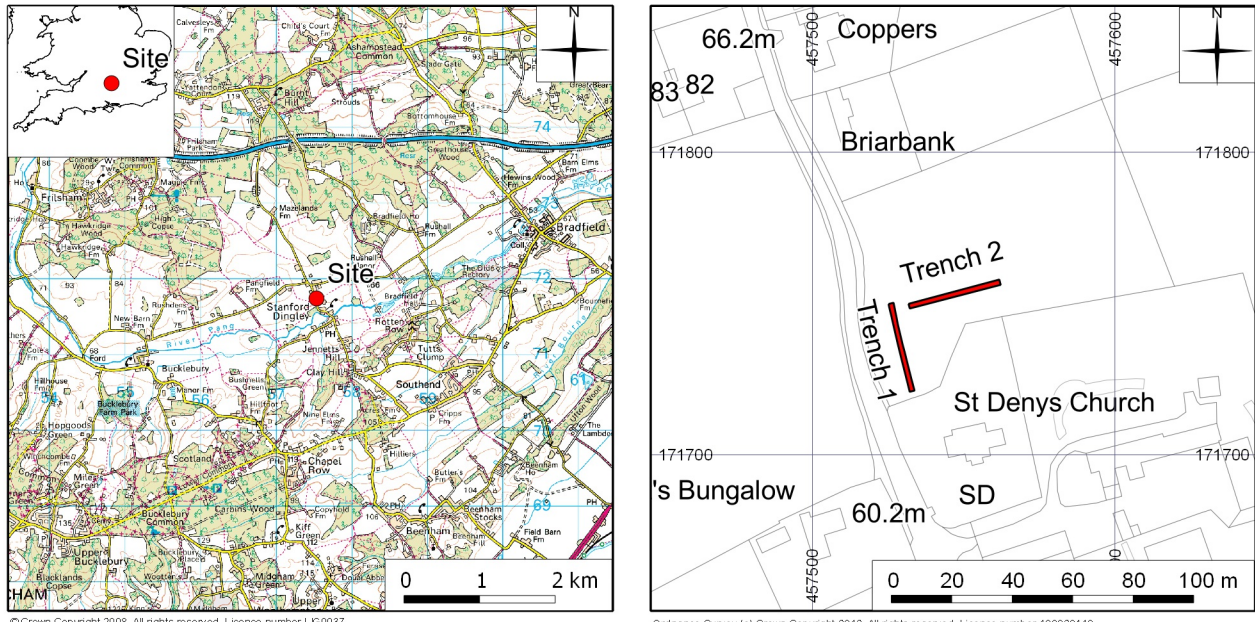


Figure 1. Site location

again until 1324 (VCH 1924). The name was recorded as Stanworde in 1086 meaning “stoney ford” and referring to the crossing of the River Pang (Ekwall 1960).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.

In particular:

- o Is there evidence relating to the early origins of the village?
- o Is there any evidence for an earlier buildings or burials associated with the pre-Conquest Church?
- o Does evidence relating to the medieval occupation of the site survive on the site?
- o Are there any deposits or features revealed in the work that enable an understanding of the scale and character of the medieval activity?
- o Is there any evidence for the development of the medieval settlement?

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

JMHS carried out the work, which comprised the excavation of two trenches, both measuring 30m × 1.6m, within the proposal area (Fig. 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in JMHS’s *WSI* agreed with BCAS.

3.2 Methodology

The investigation involved the mechanical excavation of two trenches, measuring 30m × 1.6m. Excavation was carried out by a JCB, using a ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision, supplemented by hand investigation of the revealed deposits.

Site procedures carried out followed IfA guidelines. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

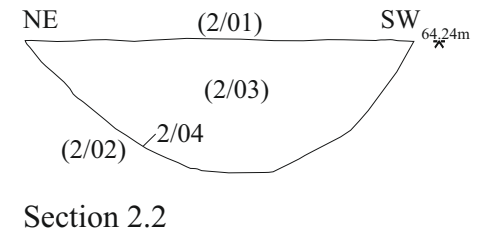
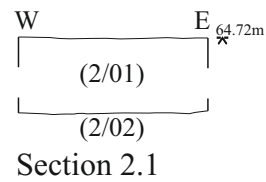
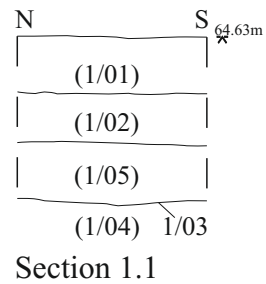
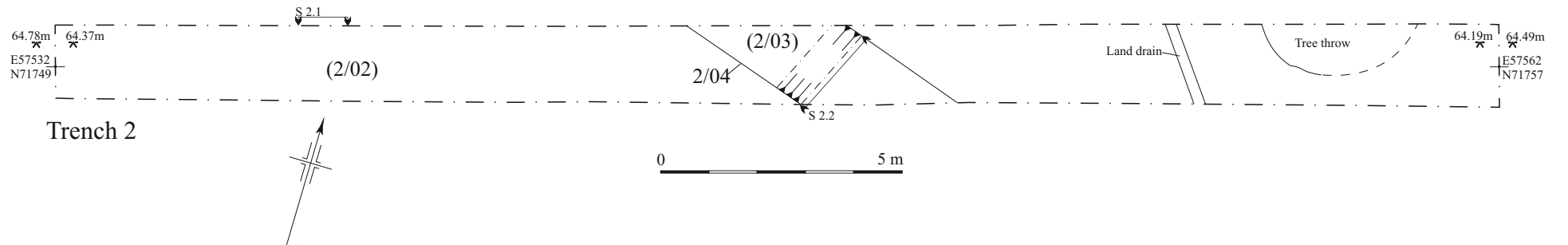
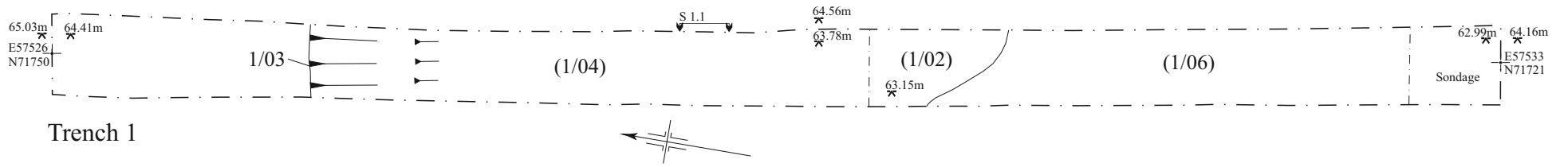


Figure 2. Plans and sections

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results (Figs 1-4)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material. All contexts numbers are preceded by trench number and /. Details of individual trenches are in Appendix 1 – the context inventory – at the rear of report.

Trench 1 (Figs 1, 2 &3) measured 30m in length, and was oriented north/south. The trench was excavated onto natural second terrace gravel (1/04) at the north end of the trench. This gravel was stepped down 5.5m from the north end of the trench (Fig. 2). It was not clear whether this was a natural break in the fall of the land or a consequence of quarrying or other landscaping, as no northern limit to the putative cut 1/03 was observed. Overlying the gravel (1/04) was a mid brown silty loam (1/05) approximately 0.3m thick in the centre of the trench; at the north end it was less thick – *c.* 0.25m – and the south end *c.* 0.35m.



Figure 3. Trench 1; looking south.

Overlying the layer of topsoil-like material (1/05) was a darker brown silty clay loam (1/02) with *c.* 5% large mixed gravels measuring *c.* 0.25m in the centre of the trench, *c.* 0.2m at the north end and *c.* 0.3m at the south end, which may well also represent a layer of imported topsoil; two sherds of white transfer ware were recovered from this deposit. In the southern half of the trench the layer of redeposited apparent topsoil (1/02) was overlain by a *c.* 0.25m thick layer of dirty yellow brown clay and gravel (1/06), extending to the south for more than 11.5m and beyond the limits of investigation. Topsoil (1/01), which measured between *c.* 0.2m and *c.* 0.3m thick sealed the whole trench (Fig.2 Section 1.1).

Trench 2 also measured 30m in length, and was oriented east/west (Figs 1, 2 & 4). The trench was excavated onto natural second terrace gravels (2/02) (Fig 2 Section 2.1). An west by northwest/east by southeast ditch 2/04 was present halfway along the trench. The ditch was more than 3m long, extending beyond the edges of investigation, *c.* 2m wide and 0.7m deep. The fill of the ditch was stiff grey brown silty clay and gravel (2/03) (Fig 2 Section 2.2), and yielded a single fragment of brick,

dating from after the Roman period. The ditch was apparently quickly back-filled but the on-site weather-conditions made it difficult to be absolutely certain.



Figure 4. Trench 2, looking east

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological evaluation took place in reasonably good conditions in the morning, which deteriorated during the afternoon. Duncan Coe, the Archaeological Officer for West Berkshire Council, monitored the work.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Finds by Gwilym Williams

Pottery

Two fragments of white earthenware, weighing 21 g, were recovered from (1/02) the fill of the terraced area 1/04. Both are blue transfer ware rim fragments of soup-plates or bowls, dating from the early 19th century onwards. It is not recommended that they be retained.

Brick

A fragment of brick measuring 35m (thick) × >115m (length) × >74mm (wide), and weighing 387g was recovered from the fill (2/03) of ditch 2/04.

The brick was examined by eye without magnification.

The brick fragment is handmade. The clay is orange-pink in colour with occasional small flint and haematite inclusions; there is a trace of faint grey reduction in the centre of the brick extending beyond the break on the long side of the brick. There is clear folding of the clay, best seen on the external faces, and occasional traces of presumably organic matter burnt during firing. There are sandy traces on all four extant faces.

The brick is not easily datable as the brick is incomplete and the dimensions of a single small fragment are rarely sufficiently diagnostic. The brick would, however,

appear to date from the Roman period, although greater precision is not possible. It would seem to be a *bessales* usually used as flooring or for walls as a course between rough stone coursing.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken as the potential of the deposits was not felt to be sufficient to warrant sampling.

6 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation carried out on parish land to the north of St Denys Church, Stanford Dingley revealed evidence in Trench 2 for a ditch at *c.* 45° to the main road through the village. There was no clear evidence for slumping or recutting of the ditch; however, the inclemency of the weather and hard digging conditions may well have contributed to a limited understanding of the backfilling sequence.

It is clear that the alignment of the ditch is not easily reconciled with other local topographical features, such as the main road through the village, or the church to the south. It is not visible on any of the Ordnance Survey maps. The sole find from the ditch section investigated comprised a fragment of Roman brick, which came from well within the fill, although not at the base. This indicates the possible presence of a Roman building.

The earliest Ordnance Survey (1st ed. 1878 1:2500) indicates a negative feature approximately 20m to the north of the church in the general area of the present access to the field. It is possible that this linear earthwork may form part of a moated enclosure, which would then include both the church and the manor; the church, which is believed to be pre-Conquest, may well have started out as a manorial chapel, such as at Mill Cotton, Northants (Parry 2006, 186-95).

Trench 1 evidenced significant importation of topsoil-like deposits, pottery from which was 19th century. It was not clear within the constraints of the evaluation whether this was the backfill of a negative feature such as quarrying or the raising of the ground-level within the field, north of the linear earthwork.

It is clear that the natural within Trench 1 was still between *c.* 1.35m and 1.55m above the level of the main road through the village, immediately to the west. The dump of topsoil-like materials in Trench 1 demonstrates the raising of ground-level within the field, to a height of between *c.* 2.25m and 2.5m above the present ground-level of the road.

A marked step was noted 5.5m from the north end of the trench. The dumping sequence may equally overlie a berm on the exterior of the moat, if the earthwork visible on the 1st edition OS map of 1878 is accurate, and, if this is the case, the step at the north end of Trench 1 possibly evidences medieval landscaping associated with the moated enclosure. Such landscaping would explain the absence of features in Trench 1, and indeed the presence of a berm would also be unlikely to accrue discarded material from manuring, as it would more than likely be maintained as an open area.

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Appendix 1: Archaeological Context Inventory

Context	Type	Description	L (m)	B (m)	D(m)	Finds	Date	Interpretation	
Trench 1									
	(1/01)	Layer	Moderately compact brown clay humus	>30	>1.6	c. 0.3		Modern	Topsoil
	(1/02)	Layer	Dark brown silty clay loam with c. 5% large mixed gravels	>30	>1.6	0.2-0.3	Y	19 th -20 th C	Fill of quarry pit, or landscaping layer
	1/03	Cut	No top seen; gentle slope, break of slope only seen at step	>30	>1.6	0.45-0.9		19 th -20 th C	Possible cut for landscaping or quarry pit
	(1/04)	Layer	Bright yellow sandy clay and gravel	>30	>1.6	Unknown		Natural	Natural; 2 nd terrace gravel
	(1/05)	Layer	Mid brown silty loam	>7.4	>1.6	0.25-0.35		19 th -20 th C	Fill of quarry pit, or landscaping layer
	(1/06)	Layer	Dirty yellow brown clay and gravel	>12.5	>1.6	0.25		19 th -20 th C	Fill of quarry pit, or landscaping layer
Trench 2									
	(2/01)	Layer	Moderately compact brown clay humus	>30	>1.6	c. 0.3		Modern	Topsoil
	(2/02)	Layer	Bright yellow sandy clay and gravel	>30	>1.6	Unknown		Natural	Natural; 2 nd terrace gravel
	(2/03)	Fill	Stiff grey brown silty clay and gravel	>3	>2	0.7	Y	Roman	Fill of field boundary ditch
	2/04	Cut	Sharp BoS of slope at top; rounded at base	>3	>2	0.7		Roman	Field boundary ditch